

# Immunogenic properties of collagen and ovalbumin modified by chlorination

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## Abstract

Hypochlorite ( $\text{HOCl/OCl}^-$ ), a product of activated neutrophils, significantly contributes to protein oxidation which occurs at a site of inflammation. Proteins modified by chlorination changed their biological activity such as enzymatic activity, resistance to proteolytic cleavage and immunogenicity. We previously reported that ovalbumin (OVA) modified with  $\text{HOCl}$  was processed and presented more efficiently than native OVA. Recently we have shown that  $\text{HOCl}$ , at the same concentrations, diminished arthritogenic and immunogenic properties of collagen type II (CII). In this study we evaluate the capacity of CII and OVA modified with  $\text{HOCl}$  to stimulate antigen-specific immune response to epitopes present on native proteins. Chlorination of OVA with 1mM  $\text{HOCl}$  results in its enhanced immunogenic properties. Chlorinated OVA more effectively stimulated OVA-specific T cell hybridoma and IgG production than native OVA. In contrast to that 3 mM  $\text{HOCl}$  completely abolished the capacity of CII to stimulate B cell response specific to native form of collagen but retained its ability to stimulate antigen specific T cells. Thus, oxidative protein modification with  $\text{HOCl}$  will result in different biological effect depending on the presence of target molecules in functionally active center of chlorinated proteins.

**Key words:** neutrophils, myeloperoxidase,  $\text{HOCl}$ , antigen processing, collagen, ovalbumin

(Centr Eur J Immunol 2003; 28 (4): 160-166)

## Introduction

Inflammation is characterized by accumulation, adhesion, and activation of neutrophils and macrophages, which results in the destruction of inflamed tissue. This effect is thought to be mediated in part by the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS), a group of reactants that includes superoxide ( $\text{O}_2^-$ ), hydrogen peroxide ( $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ ) and hypochlorous acid ( $\text{HOCl}$ ) [1]. In contrast to  $\text{O}_2^-$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ , which do not exhibit significant reactivity with biological compounds,  $\text{HOCl}$ , a highly reactive oxidant, readily reacts with primary amines to generate long lived N-chloramines (e.g. taurine monochloramine) [2, 3]. Although N-chloramines have a lower oxidizing potential than  $\text{HOCl}$ , their much longer effective lifetime would enable them to contribute in the regulation of inflammatory response. It has been shown that taurine chloramine (TauCl), the primary neutrophil chloramines, has strong anti-inflammatory and immunoregulatory properties [4-7].

Determining the ability of  $\text{HOCl}$  to contribute in the pathogenesis of inflammatory processes associated with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is highly dependent on determining the relevant target(s). The most likely protein target for neutrophil oxidants in RA seems to be collagen type II (CII), the major component of articular cartilage [8]. Davies et al. reported that  $\text{HOCl}$  (>1.0 mM) was required to cause direct fragmentation of CII. In addition,  $\text{HOCl}$  increased the degradation of collagen by collagenase [9, 10]. Much less is known whether the oxidative modification (chlorination) of collagen affects its immunogenic properties. Recently we have shown (manuscript in preparation) that collagen chlorination abolished its arthritogenic capacity and diminished the production of IgG antibodies specific to native collagen. On the other hand, cleavage of heat denaturated CII by neutrophil gelatinase B reveals enzyme specificity, post-translational modifications of the substrate, and the formation of remnant epitopes in rheumatoid arthritis [11]. All these data indicate that protein modification by oxidation (e.g. chlorination)

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alter immunogenic capacity of proteins and in the case of self-proteins it may result in breaking of an autotolerance and induction of autoimmunity.

The aim of the present study was to evaluate the effect of chlorination of chicken collagen type II (CII) and chicken albumin (OVA) on their capacity to induce B and T cell response specific to epitopes of native form of the antigens.

## Materials and methods

### Mice

Male DBA/J mice between 8-12 weeks of age, from the breeding unit of Department of Immunology, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Kraków, Poland, were used.

### Protein chlorination with HOCl

Samples of chicken albumin (OVA) or chicken collagen type II (CII) (both from Sigma, St. Louis, MO) dissolved at a concentration of 2 mg/ml in 0.2 M phosphate buffer (pH 7.4), were incubated with 1, 3 or 5 mM HOCl/OCl<sup>-</sup> at room temperature for 2 hours. To stop the reaction samples were treated with stoichiometrical amount of tiosulfate. To remove excess of free HOCl and tiosulfate, samples of chlorinated proteins were dialyzed for 24 hours in 0.2 M phosphate buffer at 4°C.

### Immunization

*Primary immunization:* Mice were immunized intradermally with 200 µg of either native (OVA<sub>NAT</sub>, CII<sub>NAT</sub>) or chlorinated (OVA<sub>HOCl</sub>, CII<sub>HOCl</sub>) proteins emulsified in complete Freund's adjuvant (CFA) (Sigma). The same protocol was used for OVA and CII immunization.

*Booster immunization:* On day 21 after the first immunization mice were injected subcutaneously with 100 µg of native protein either alone (suboptimal immunization), or in CFA. In some experiments mice received only primary immunization.

### Proliferation assay

For proliferation assay, the draining lymph nodes were taken 12 days after the primary immunization. The LN cells were cultured in 96-well, flat-bottom tissue plates at a concentration 2x10<sup>5</sup>/well in RPMI 1640 medium (Gibco BRL, Gaithersburg, MD) supplemented with 5% FCS (Gibco BRL), 20mM HEPES, 20 mM L-glutamine, 5x10<sup>-5</sup>M 2-mercaptoethanol (all from Sigma) and antibiotics. After 72h incubation (at 37°C in 5% atmosphere of CO<sub>2</sub>) in the presence of different concentrations of either OVA or CII, the cells were labeled with 1 µCi/well <sup>3</sup>H-thymidine for 18-20 hours and then harvested onto a glass fiber filter mat and measured in a solid scintillator by β-counter (Trilux 1 Wallac, Turku, Finland - a gift from The Wellcome Trust Foundation).

### Measurement of serum IgG specific to OVA and CII by ELISA

Mice were anesthetized and bled on days 12 or 21 after primary immunization and additionally 7 days after booster immunization. Serum level of IgG antibodies against native CII or native OVA was measured using a standard ELISA assay.

Briefly, individual serum samples were stored at -80°C until they were used for the ELISA. Microtiter plates (Corning, NY) were coated overnight with 5 µg/ml of collagen type II (acid soluble) or ovalbumin (both Sigma, Steinham, Germany) in phosphate buffered saline (PBS) at 4°C. Non specific binding was blocked with 4% bovine serum albumin (BSA) in PBS at room temperature for 1 hour. Diluted serum samples (in 1% BSA in PBS) were added and incubated for 1 hour at room temperature. The plates were then incubated with biotinylated goat anti-mouse IgG antibody (Sigma) for 45 minutes at room temperature. Horseradish peroxidase (HRP) conjugated streptavidin diluted 1:1000 in 1% BSA/PBS was added and plates were incubated for 45 minutes at room temperature. Then OPD (o-phenylenediamine dihydrochloride) (Sigma) was used as a substrate (5 mg of OPD in 10 ml of phosphate-citrate buffer, pH = 5.0) and incubated with 40 µl of 30% H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> for 30 min at room temperature. The reaction was stopped with 3M H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>. Optical density was measured at 492 nm in a plate reader (PowerWave<sub>X</sub>, Bio-Tek Instruments, Winooski, VT - gift from The Foundation for Polish Science).

### Activation of OVA-specific T cell hybridoma

APCs (A-20-2J - H-2<sup>d</sup> positive B lymphoma line) (5x10<sup>5</sup>/well) were preincubated in 96-well, flat-bottom tissue plates at different concentrations of native or modified OVA in RPMI 1640 medium (Gibco BRL, Gaithersburg, MD) supplemented with 5% FCS (Gibco BRL). After 2 hours of the preincubation 2x10<sup>5</sup>/well of OVA-specific T cell hybridoma (DO11.10 - H-2<sup>d</sup> restricted) were added and co-cultured for additional 24 h. Next day supernatants (SN) were removed, collected and frozen in -20°C for a bioassay. The activity of interleukine-2 (IL-2) produced by the activated T cell hybridoma was measured in the SN using IL-2-dependent cytotoxic T lymphoma line cells (CTL cells), as described previously [12]. SN from APCs co-incubated with OVA-specific T hybridoma without antigen was used as a control.

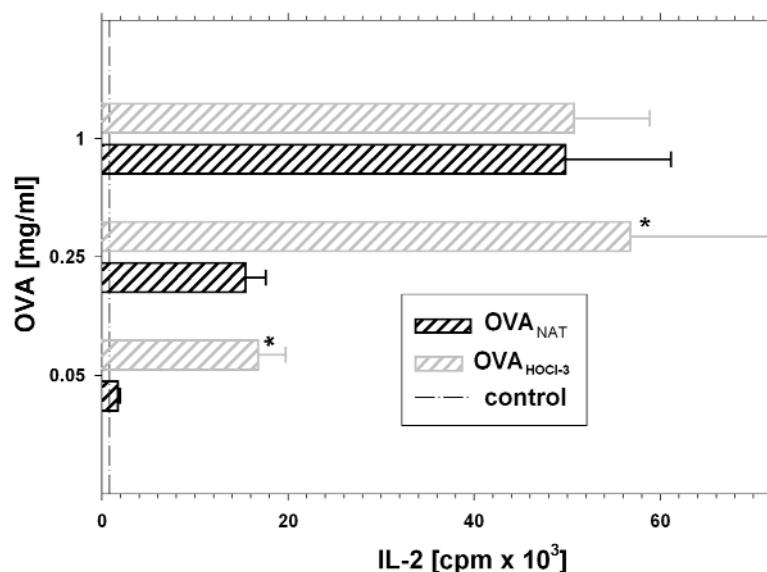
### Statistical analysis

Results are expressed as mean +/- SEM. Statistical significance was determined by the Student's *t*-test and differences were regarded as significant at *p*<0.05.

## Results

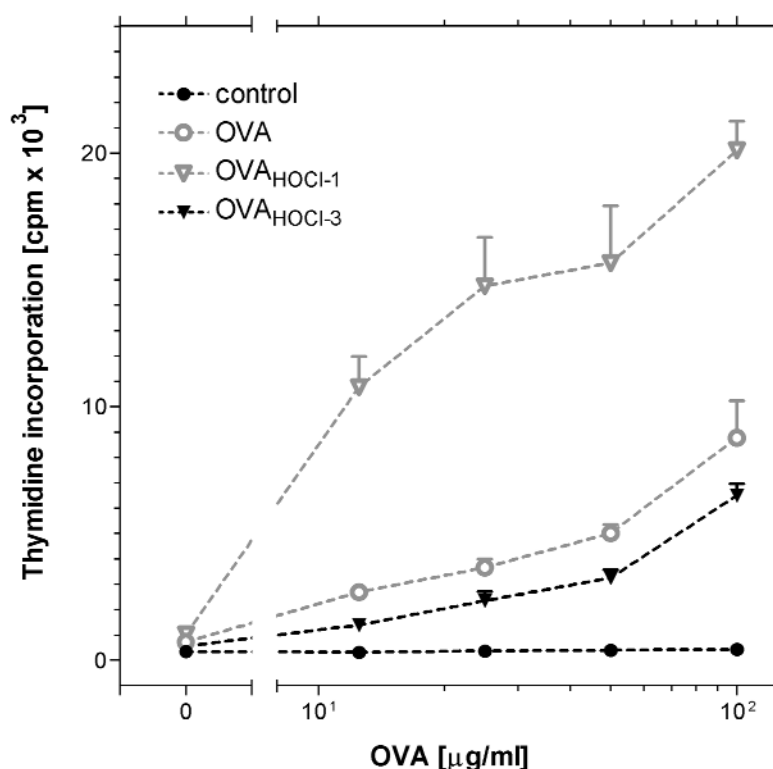
### IL-2 release from OVA-specific T cell hybridoma stimulated with native and chlorinated OVA.

Previously we have shown an enhanced immunogenicity of OVA chlorinated (OVA<sub>HOCl</sub>) with



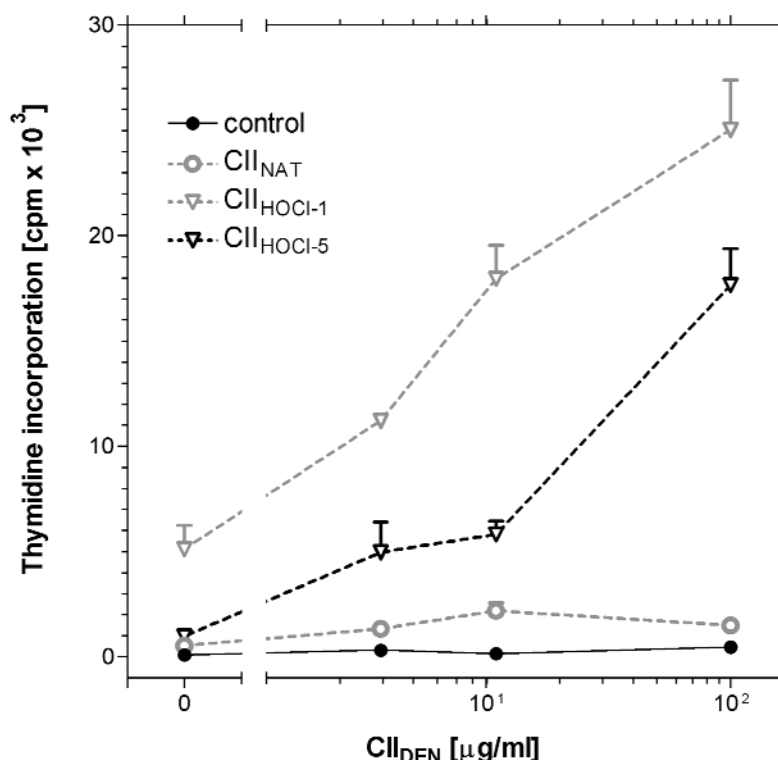
**Fig. 1.** IL-2 release from OVA-specific T cell hybridoma stimulated with native or chlorinated OVA.

APCs (A20-J B lymphoma line) were incubated with either native (OVA<sub>NAT</sub>) or chlorinated (OVA<sub>HOCl</sub>) ovalbumin. After 2 hours OVA-specific T cells (DO-11-10 T cell hybridoma) were added. After additional 24 hours supernatants were collected and the level of IL-2 produced by activated OVA-specific T cell hybridoma was measured (for details see Materials and Methods). Results are expressed as a mean  $\pm$  SEM from four independent experiments (\*  $p < 0.01$  OVA<sub>NAT</sub> vs. OVA<sub>HOCl</sub>)



**Fig. 2.** *In vitro* proliferation of OVA-specific LN-cells taken from mice immunized either with native or chlorinated OVA.

Mice were immunized with either native (OVA<sub>NAT</sub>) or chlorinated (OVA<sub>HOCl-1</sub> = OVA chlorinated with 1 mM HOCl; OVA<sub>HOCl-3</sub> = OVA chlorinated with 3 mM HOCl) ovalbumin in CFA, as described in Methods. For proliferation assay the draining lymph nodes were taken 12 days later. LN-cells were cultured at the presence of different concentrations of OVA<sub>NAT</sub>. Results represent one of three independent experiments



**Fig. 3.** *In vitro* proliferation of CII-specific LN-cells taken from mice immunized either with native or chlorinated collagen. Mice were immunized with either native (CII<sub>NAT</sub>) or chlorinated (CII<sub>HOCl-1</sub> = CII chlorinated with 1 mM HOCl; CII<sub>HOCl-5</sub> = CII chlorinated with 5 mM HOCl) chicken collagen type II in CFA, as described in Methods. For proliferation assay the draining lymph nodes were taken 12 days later. LN-cells were cultured at the presence of different concentrations of heat denaturated collagen II (CII<sub>DEN</sub>). Results represent one of five independent experiments

HOCl in the range 1.0 - 7.0 mM. Recently we have published that CII chlorinated with HOCl at concentrations above 1.0 mM lost its arthritogenic capacity. In this study to compare the influence of chlorination on OVA and CII immunogenicity, both proteins were modified with HOCl at concentrations of 1.0 and 3.0 mM.

As shown in Fig.1, OVA modified by chlorination stimulated the production of IL-2 more effectively than the native protein. The enhanced immunogenic properties of HOCl-treated OVA were observed more clearly with suboptimal doses of antigen (<0.5 mg OVA/ml).

#### ***In vitro* proliferation of Ag-specific LN-cells taken from mice immunized either with native or chlorinated antigens.**

To determine immunogenicity of *in vivo* injected chlorinated antigens (OVA and CII), a proliferation assay was set up with the draining lymph node cells taken from immunized mice and restimulated *in vitro* with corresponding antigens. LN-cells taken from mice immunized with OVA<sub>HOCl-1</sub> (OVA chlorinated with 1mM HOCl) showed stronger proliferative response than those taken from mice immunized with native OVA. No

differences were found between mice immunized with native OVA and OVA<sub>HOCl-3</sub> (OVA chlorinated with 3 mM HOCl) (Fig. 2.).

In contrast to that, LN-cells of mice immunized with collagen modified by HOCl (CII<sub>HOCl-1</sub> and CII<sub>HOCl-5</sub>) responded with a stronger proliferative response than LN-cells of mice immunized with native collagen, as shown in Fig. 3.

#### **Antibody responses in mice immunized with HOCl-modified antigens.**

Differential effect of chlorination on OVA and CII capacity to stimulate *in vivo* an antigen specific humoral immune response was observed. Serum IgG titer to native antigens (OVA, CII) was determined at the same timepoint after primary immunization as the proliferation assay was performed. As shown in Table1A, OVA modification with lower concentration of HOCl (OVA<sub>HOCl-1</sub>) induced a twofold increment of the IgG antibody response to native, unmodified OVA as compared with IgG production after immunization with native OVA (OVA<sub>NAT</sub>). On the contrary, chlorination with higher concentration of HOCl (OVA<sub>HOCl-3</sub>) caused very strong decrease of IgG titers to OVA<sub>NAT</sub>.

The effect of HOCl on ability of collagen to stimulate the production of IgG specific to native CII (CII<sub>NAT</sub>) differ from that observed after chlorination of OVA. Chlorination of CII, decreased in a dose dependent manner, its capacity to stimulate production of IgG anti-CII<sub>NAT</sub> (Table 1B). Serum IgG titer to CII<sub>NAT</sub> after the immunization with CII<sub>HOCl-1</sub> was 3 times lower than IgG titer after the immunization with CII<sub>NAT</sub>. After immunization with CII<sub>HOCl-3</sub> the level of IgG anti-CII<sub>NAT</sub> was similar to that observed in naive mice. It suggests that CII<sub>HOCl-3</sub> did not stimulate antigen specific humoral response, at least to epitopes of native form of collagen. Surprisingly, primary immunization with CII<sub>HOCl-3</sub> followed by suboptimal booster immunization with CII<sub>NAT</sub> resulted in the production of IgG anti-CII<sub>NAT</sub> (Table 2.).

Chlorination of collagen with TauCl or with HOCl in the presence of taurine did not affect capacity of collagen to induce the production of IgG specific to native antigen.

## Discussion

Oxidation of proteins is a common phenomenon which occurs at a site of inflammation [13, 14]. It exerts several potential biological effects on proteins, such as alteration of enzymatic activity, alteration of susceptibility to enzymatic digestion and change in immunogenicity [15-19]. We have previously reported such biological effects of chlorination on OVA. Chlorination of OVA increased its susceptibility to proteolysis [20]. Moreover, chlorinated

OVA was a stronger immunogen than the native OVA. However, the extent of chlorination was critical, as overchlorinated OVA again became a poorer immunogen [12, 21-23].

To study immunogenicity of proteins modified by chlorination we used two experimental models. Firstly, *in vitro* chlorinated chicken albumin (OVA) was incubated with APC cells and presented to OVA specific T cells. The chlorination of OVA by HOCl facilitates its processing and/or presentation by APC resulting in augmentation of IL-2 production by OVA-specific T-cell hybridoma [12]. It was also shown that chlorination facilitates proteolysis by trypsin and cathepsin D. The latter enzyme is involved in the processing of protein by APC. Secondly, *in vitro* chlorinated bovine albumin (BSA) was conjugated with trinitrophenyl (TNP) hapten. TNP-specific humoral response was tested in mice immunized with TNP-BSA conjugates composed of either native or chlorinated carrier proteins [22]. It is well known that T-dependent antigens (e.g. TNP-BSA) are recognized by both hapten-specific B cells (anti-TNP response) and carrier-specific T helper cells (anti-BSA response). We have shown that antigens (TNP-BSA) containing chlorinated carrier stimulate anti-TNP humoral response more effectively than the native TNP protein conjugate. The effect was mainly dependent on increased T cell clonal expansion [22].

Only recently we have shown (manuscript in preparation) that chlorinated chicken type II collagen lost its ability to induce collagen induced arthritis (CIA) and to

**Table 1.** Antibody responses to native antigens after immunization with antigens modified by HOCl

Antigen	[Units]	IgG anti native Ag	[%]
<b>A. OVA + CFA</b>		IgG anti OVA <sub>NAT</sub> (Day 12)	
OVA <sub>NAT</sub>	80±48		100
OVA <sub>HOCl-1</sub>	160±72		200*
OVA <sub>HOCl-3</sub>	12±6		15**
<b>B. CII + CFA</b>		IgG anti CII <sub>NAT</sub> (Day 12)	
CII <sub>NAT</sub>	190±82		100
CII <sub>HOCl-1</sub>	74±62		39*
CII <sub>HOCl-3</sub>	≤4		–
CII <sub>TauCl-3</sub>	173±71		91
Naive	<4		–

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.001$  in comparison native antigen.

Results are reported using arbitrary defined units [ $1U = \text{IgG titer } 1/100$ ] and are expressed as a mean  $\pm$  SEM from 5 independent experiments. Each experimental group consist of 6-10 mice

Ag<sub>NAT</sub> - native protein

Ag<sub>HOCl-1</sub> - protein chlorinated with 1 mM HOCl

Ag<sub>HOCl-3</sub> - protein chlorinated with 3 mM HOCl

Ag<sub>TauCl-3</sub> - protein treated with 3 mM TauCl



trigger the generation of IgG antibodies specific to native collagen. At the same experimental conditions tolerogenic properties of chlorinated collagen was retained. It may suggest that both, arthritogenic and immunodominant B cell epitopes of native protein were destroyed by chlorination, while some T cell epitopes were not affected.

In this study, using the same experimental conditions to modify proteins by HOCl, we compared the effect of chlorination on immunogenicity of CII and ovalbumin OVA.

Our present results confirm previous observations and demonstrate that HOCl at concentration ranging from 1.0 - 3.0 mM may enhance capacity of OVA to stimulate OVA-specific T cells. It indicates that chlorination does not affect OVA<sub>323-339</sub> determinant, which is recognized by DO11-10 cells, an OVA specific T cell hybridoma [12]. On the other hand, IgG production specific to B cell epitopes expressed on native OVA was not altered by 3 mM HOCl.

The effect of chlorination of CII was different from that observed for chlorination of OVA. Chlorination in a dose dependent manner decreased CII capacity to induce B cell immune response specific to native form of collagen. This effect correlated with the structural changes of collagen observed during chlorination [24]. Mice immunized with collagen modified by 3 mM HOCl, did not produce IgG antibodies specific to CII<sub>NAT</sub>. It may suggest that HOCl at the concentration 3mM, in which fragmentation of collagen was observed [24], destroys B cell epitopes of native protein. Surprisingly, these mice after suboptimal booster immunization with CII produce IgG anti-CII<sub>NAT</sub> antibodies. It indicates, that chlorinated collagen retained some native epitopes and during primary immunization generated T helper memory cells specific to carrier epitope(s) present on

native form of collagen. This clonal expansion of T helper cells results in activation of B cells to produce antibodies against antigen used in the booster immunization. These results, together with the results which showed increased lymph node cells proliferation after immunization with chlorinated collagen suggest that chlorination preferentially enhances T cell dependent antigen-specific immune response. It may be explained by the fact that T cell epitopes are more resistant to oxidative modification than B cell epitopes [25]. Further studies are necessary to explain the effect of HOCl on structure of different proteins (see differences in immunogenicity of chlorinated OVA and CII). Primary chlorination affecting chloramine-type derivative formation, the secondary chlorination producing stable chlorotyrosine residues, chloramines decomposition products with carbonyl group formation and generation of reactive aldehydes should be taken into consideration [18].

Formation of these chlorine moieties in the polypeptide chain containing antigen epitopes will result in an altered antigen immunogenicity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, our present and previous studies, concerning the role of MPO-halide system in modification of the immune response showed that oxidative modification of proteins by HOCl may alter their biological functions including their resistance to proteolytic cleavage, immunogenicity and pathogenicity. Chlorination will affect distinct proteins in different ways depending on the presence of target functional groups (-NH<sub>2</sub>, -SH, -S-S, >C=O, tyrosine, tryptophan) [20, 21]. More generally, our

**Table 2.** Priming with chlorinated collagen enhances IgG production to CII<sub>NAT</sub> after booster immunization with suboptimal doses of native collagen

Ag administration		IgG anti CII <sub>NAT</sub> [Units]	
Priming* (0)	Boost** (21)	Day (21)	Day (21+7)
∅	C <sub>NAT</sub>	–	<4
CII <sub>NAT</sub>	∅	512	1024
CII <sub>NAT</sub>	C <sub>NAT</sub>	512	1024
CII <sub>HOCl-1</sub>	∅	64	64
CII <sub>HOCl-1</sub>	C <sub>NAT</sub>	64	1024
CII <sub>HOCl-3</sub>	∅	<4	<4
CII <sub>HOCl-3</sub>	C <sub>NAT</sub>	<4	256

Results represent one of five independent experiments. Each experimental group consist of 6-10 mice.

\* intradermal immunization with 200 µg CII in CFA

\*\* subcutaneous immunization with 100 µg CII without adjuvant

CII<sub>NAT</sub> – native collagen

CII<sub>HOCl-1</sub> – collagen chlorinated with 1 mM HOCl

CII<sub>HOCl-3</sub> – collagen chlorinated with 3 mM HOCl

study provides further evidence for a role of neutrophils in modulation of adaptive immunity. As neutrophils are the first cells at a site of acute inflammation, the products they release (HOCl, TauCl) have the capacity to influence antigen immunogenicity, APC function and the subsequent function of effector T cells. Further studies are necessary to estimate the role of chlorination of proteins (tagging of autoantigens) in etiopathogenesis of autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

### Acknowledgments

This work was supported by grant from the Committee of Scientific Research (Warsaw, Poland) Grant No. 4PO 5B 01018. T cell hybridoma activation by chlorinated ovalbumin was partially made in the Department of Immunology University College London as a part of collaboration with Prof. B. Chain.

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